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C O N F I D E N T I A L DHAKA 003418

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [BG](#) [JI](#)

SUBJECT: SPLIT AMONG BANGLADESHI ISLAMIST GROUPS FESTERS

REF: DHAKA 02409

Classified By: A/DCM D.C. McCullough, reasons 1.4 b,d.

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Jamaat Islami leaders assert they are unfazed by increased attempts by other Islamist elements to discredit JI as the principal voice of political Islam in Bangladesh. END SUMMARY

[1](#)2. (SBU) On July 10, poloff met with AMM Bahauddin, editor of the Islamist oriented "Inquilab" newspaper regarding a recent meeting of top Islamic scholars which branded Jamaat Islami (JI) as the "main enemy of Islam." This event is part of a movement started a few months back among factions of the Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ), a member of the ruling coalition, and AMM Bahauddin to unite a large number of Islamist groups against the mainstream JI and undermine the BNP-led coalition (reftel).

[1](#)3. (C) Bahauddin, who organized the meeting of Islamist scholars, claimed that JI itself has been targeting the institutions of "mainstream Islamic practice" in Bangladesh and in that way became the "main enemy of Islam." He pointed to JI's disapproval and denunciation of Bangladeshi worship at Islamic shrines and the pir system as examples of targeted institutions. He cited theological differences as the main points of contention between JI and other Islamist parties and scholars. According to Bahauddin, hardly 10% of alia madrassah teachers support JI and that most Qwami madrassahs are against JI.

[1](#)4. On July 11, poloff met with Abdul Razzaq, Assistant Secretary General of JI, who was quick to downplay and

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dismiss the statements made against JI. He acknowledged that there are differences within the four party ruling coalition but characterized the main differences as political--"we are in the government they aren't"--and not theological. Razzaq suggested that "forces outside the Islamic groups are trying to dismantle the alliance" and that differences within the coalition are exaggerated by the media. Razzaq concluded, "If the BNP and JI stay together, there is no difference if the other Islamic groups separate--they are fringe and insignificant anyways."

[1](#)5. Razzaq also noted the differences in madrassah support within the Islamic coalition but was confident that JI enjoyed more widespread support than the other parties. Even though he acknowledged growing differences, he hoped that by election time there would be no more gulf between the Islamic parties.

[1](#)6. (C) Comment: While the anti-JI groups aim to embarrass and undermine the JI's claim to be the voice of political Islam in Bangladesh, the JI-BNP alliance looks strong enough to withstand these barbs.

CHAMMAS